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By-Robinson, David W.

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The awe and wonder with which the public once viewed US colleges and universities is now changing to anger and disgust as a result of well-publicized campus disorders. On the University of Wisconsin (Madison) campus, less than one-tenth of 1% of the total student body are activists who advocate the takeover of the "establishment." This group gets most of the publicity, rather than the 17,600 other students who are on campus to learn, grow, and develop within the framework of order. There is a large group of students who want student power, by which they mean student participation in running the university. Educators must accept that these students have something to say, and realize that today's students cannot be manipulated. There are shortcomings in higher education at faculty, administrative, and student levels which need to be improved and corrected. Much homework needs to be done in terms of relating the campus environment to society, and improving communications between students and the faculty, the administration and students, and the university and the community. The students seem to want improvement from within the university with the goal of contributing as best they can to a well-ordered society within the framework of the law. The role of higher education is to lead in fairness and courage towards a creative, orderly society whose participants are limited to the least possible degree. (WM)

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ROBINSON, DAVID W.

LAW AND ORDER IN A FREE SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Section 1
Monday Morning, March 3

LAW AND ORDER IN A FREE SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION*

David V. Robinson
Dean of Student Affairs
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

One goal of higher education is to assist an individual in the understanding of himself and his role in society; an ordered society, regulated by written laws and laws of consent; a society in which as much freedom as possible can exist for its members. Educators can no longer view theirs as a world of searching for truth regardless of the outcome; of conducting this search in a place untouched by a larger society. No longer is it a quiet, protected environment in which learning for the sake of learning is the hallmark. Higher education is part of the community in which it is found; it is part of the larger communities which it touches through its students...publications... dissemination of knowledge...its reputation.

Educators have permitted and most of us continue to permit, if not welcome, dialogue, discussion, orderly protest and eloquent dissent. This has fitted into the rhythm of academia. We have been the ones who have used the word "freedom" so frequently in terms of freedom of man to search and research, to learn and share his learning. This has been another of our banners; it has certainly been accepted as a tradition of our society. But we are well into a new era, one in which some segments of our total society, and an increasingly large segment of our academic groups are willing to limit this freedom. It is most obvious that the subject of student dissent has been the stimulus for this new conservative move.

Through educational research we have identified and conveyed very completely and accurately that a small group of people have and can manipulate large groups. We educated that daring and courage supported by a careful appraisal of individuals in a power structure are strong motivating forces for group behavior. We have taught for example how to evaluate professors and administrators at whom attention, pleas, or rejection might be projected. We have taught how to identify those in each community who most easily yield to threats of force and threats of intimidation. We have taught that small groups can easily multiply in numbers by being attractive to larger numbers of uniformed and relatively uninvolved fellow citizens.

An interesting twist to me is that an increased number of educators, even those who might be considered liberal in their views, are expressing concern about the results of these lessons. An increased number of people are willing to suppress these freedoms. The justification of this is simple. Until this recent era, colleges and universities in this country were considered centers of enlightenment. They were looked upon with awe and wonder by the bewildered and sometimes distraught population. The bewilderment and distraction is now changing significantly to anger and disgust at the weaknesses seen within our institutions.

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Today what does the population at large see within our hallowed halls? Violence and disorder. This is increasing. They see a minority that claims that everybody should be absolutely free and that law should be obliterated. They see increased numbers calling for direct action. They hear the activist defend his direct action approach by saying that this country was born in violence, and has a history of violence since its inception. These people hear the activists note that they believe law in our democratic society is broken down, and because of that each individual can participate in direct action. They also hear about those few activists who admit the direct action and violence is not guaranteed in the First Amendment. They would now change the Constitution of the United States in order that they can have civil disobedience legally.

A large segment of our total population, just like we in academia, realize that all of this is rationalization and an attempt to justify mob rule as a substitute for reasoned order. That does nothing but short-stop consultation, study, confrontation, deliberation, and peaceful solution. The aforementioned might appear oblique or dark, but what else can be seen on our campuses if we look behind the scenes, or is it if we look behind the headlines? On my campus I can identify less than 1/10 of 1 percent of our total student body who connote student power as student takeover of the establishment, who are the very active student activists. Hasn't each one of us decried how unfortunate it is that this small fraction of a student body gets all of the publicity. In my case, the larger society reads very little about the other 17,600 students enrolled.

I grant in addition to that small fraction there is a large group of students who want what they call student power, but theirs is not the takeover type. The majority of our students who talk student power connote it as not running the University, but is participating in how the University is being run. They want to be on the "in," and interestingly enough not many of them want to be on the "in" in terms of voting; they want to be in the discussion and involved in the administration of the University even as an observer, to speak to decisions that are affecting their lives. Perhaps we as educators have helped create the strife we now experience. For one reason or other we have been unwilling to accept that our students do have something to say to us. The vast majority of students are on our campuses to learn and to grow and develop. They want to do this within the framework of order. They want our assistance but not crumbs from the table of knowledge. They want to participate in our deliberations not simply to be sure that our conclusions are the best, although they might be better with the insight of our young citizens, but as a learning device so that they, when they sit in positions of greater responsibility will have larger reservoirs of experience into which to dip for more knowledgeable decisions.

A premise, an objective if you wish, that is used by my staff is that as educators we, with other members of our community, are charged to help create the best possible environment in which a student can learn and grow and develop. The key there is to create as opposed to manipulate. We have far outlived the day when we as educational leaders can manipulate our student community. Law is no longer feared--and unquestioned. We need to realize one thing our students believe -- that the charge "you can't fight city hall" was originated probably by someone who works in city hall! The words "law" and "order" no longer are used singly. Todays educated person adds definitive adjectives -- to say "just law" or "unjust law;" "reasoned order" or "forced order." Responsible leaders today are asked to define and defend the concepts of these terms. Perhaps we are remiss in our reluctance to enter these dialogues.

To turn to another conception or misconception, our parent society is based on the concept of democracy in government. So frequently, we educate or hold as ideal that being a member of a democratic country, all agencies within the country should also be democratic. This is indefensible. Higher education is not democratic, and I don't think it should be. We in higher education are part of an oligarchy. Boards of trustees, made up of predominately laymen, assist in the direction of our institution. They do not take office according to popular vote in the community they serve. Neither are the professors hired or the students admitted by popular vote. Our faculty don't select textbooks they are going to use on the basis of the vote of the students that are going to be taught. Qualifications and potential for learning are and should be the standard for a choice of textbook or trustee, or freshmen or faculty.

Of course, there are shortcomings in our forms of administration, there are shortcomings in higher education which need our attention, not only at the broad level with the administration and faculty but also with the student groups and with our associates in society. All of us need to work to improve and correct these shortcomings. I don't believe that an institution has to be destroyed or closed in order to be rebuilt. I think a greater symbol of responsibility, of intellect, of freedom, can grow out of intelligent leadership, even in conflict, than can result from some mythical phoenix incarnated from the fire of destruction and devastation. But the leadership must be based on the principle of intelligent dynamics. Have we been too rigid in our rules? Have we used law as an excuse for administrative decisions? Are we excusing our role on the basis that we're part of a system? As an example, haven't we criticized local fraternities on policies of local autonomy, but excuse them when the student leaders say -- but we're part of a national organization and the national won't let us do this or that. This is only one example -- many more could be listed on each of our campuses.

What are some of the main areas that need attention? The obvious to me is communication. Communication between the faculty and the student, between administration to the student, between the community to the total collegium. We have a lot of homework to do in terms of relating just what our collegiate environment is today and how it relates to the societies of our culture. We have been derelict for too many years. As the businessman knows, the company either goes up or it goes down. It never plateaus. There has been too much complacency in higher education. Perhaps some of us have been lulled to believe that higher education has plateaued at a high level of dignity and respect. In increasing circles of society it has gone down in both dignity and respect.

If you and I respect that which we represent, higher education, we need to get in and work from within for an improvement with intelligence, information, and above all, honesty. This is what our students want; this is really all they want. We should stand up and confirm that our goal is that of contributing as best we can to a well-ordered society. Through what research we can materially complete, through the process of education that we can give our students as individuals and as groups, by participating with other leaders in the community for more meaningful responsibility, we can have an ordered society within the framework of law, both written and unwritten.

It is our role to lead, along with others in the society, not to be led. To lead in fairness and honesty and courage, not according to the whim of a voter, or the weakness of a colleague, not according to threats of whose who really want to talk, not fight, or the personal aspirations of a legislator. To lead, with honesty and courage. This will help enable us to have an ordered yet creative society whose participants are limited to the least possible degree; this is the role of higher education.